

Message Text

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47

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

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R 270901Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2584

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PINT MY

SUBJ: NEW DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER(S)?

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 1067 (DTG 260827Z FEB 76)

(B) KUALA LUMPUR 929 (DTG 200335Z FEB 76)

1. FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, WELL-CONNECTED LOCAL JOURNALIST TOLD US TODAY (FEB 27) THAT HE HAS JUST LEARNED FROM A PERSON "CLOSE TO PRIME MINISTER DATUK HUSSEIN ONN" THAT THE LATTER HAS DECIDED TO NAME CURRENT AGRICULTURE MINISTER, ABDUL GHAFAR BIN BABA, AS "DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (ONE)" AND CURRENT HOME MINISTER, MUHAMED GHAZALI BIN SHAFIE AS "DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (TWO)." ACCORDING TO THIS JOURNALIST, HE IS RECEIVING SAME INFORMATION FROM OTHER INFORMANTS.

2. ALSO IN THE AREA OF SPECULATION ON GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL CHANGES EXPECTED SHORTLY IS STORY MAKING
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THE ROUNDS THAT GOVERNMENT PETROLEUM CORPORATION,

PETRONAS, WILL BE PLACED UNDER MINISTRY OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, AND HENCE UNDER AUTHORITY OF DATUK MUSA BIN HITAM, HIGHLY REGARDED MINISTER OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES. (THIS RUMOR HAS SURFACED IN CONNECTION WITH REPORTS THAT CURRENT PETRONAS CHAIRMAN TENGKU RAZALEIGH BIN HAMZAH WILL BE RECEIVING FINANCE PORTFOLIO
PC SEE KL 929.)

3. COMMENT: IF TRUE, NAMING OF TWO DEPUTIES INSTEAD OF THE CUSTOMARY ONE DEPUTY WOULD INDICATE PM HAS DECIDED NOT TO BUCK UMNO PARTY REGULARS, WHOSE STRONG PREFERENCE IS FOR GHAFAR BABA (SENIOR UMNO VICE PRESIDENT AND LONG-TIME PARTY LOYALIST) IN FAVOR OF GHAZALI SHAFIE WHO HUSSEIN REPORTEDLY ADMIRES FOR HIS COMPETENCE, BUT WHO IS NOT POPULAR WITHIN UMNO AND WHO LACKS GRASS ROOTS SUPPORT. (IT ALSO INDICATES STRENGTH OF FEELING IN UMNO THAT PARTY SENIORITY SYSTEM SHOULD BE OBSERVED.) SUCH A STRUCTURAL ARRANGEMENT WOULD ENABLE HUSSEIN ONN TO UTILIZE GHAFAR BABA'S STANDING IN THE PARTY AND GOOD RELATIONS WITH OTHER NATIONAL FRONT PARTIES TO MAINTAIN POLITICAL HARMONY (GHAFAR IS NF GENERAL SECRETARY, AND GENERALLY WELL-REGARDED IN NF, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HEARD SOME REPORTS THAT THE RIGHT WING ISLAMIC PARTY CONSIDERS HIM TOO MUCH OF AN UMNO PARTISAN) WHILE AT THE SAME TIME BEING ABLE TO EXPLOIT GHAZALI SHAFIE'S MANY TALENTS IN BOTH THE INTERNAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS FIELDS. LOCAL OBSERVERS ALSO NOTE THAT SUCH A MOVE UNDOUBTEDLY WOULD PLEASE THE INDONESIANS, WHO ARE USED TO DEALING WITH GHAZ. IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW RESPONSIBILITIES WOULD BE DIVIDED BETWEEN THE TWO DEPUTIES OR HOW THIS WOULD AFFECT THE PARTY LEADERSHIP (THE DEPUTY PM TRADITIONALLY HAS ALSO SERVED AS DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF UMNO). IF THIS REPORT IS TRUE, EDUCATION MINISTER MAHATHIR APPEARS TO HAVE LOST THE RACE.
UNDERHILL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976KUALA01093
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760075-0032
From: KUALA LUMPUR
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976026/aaaaaeif.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 KUALA LUMPUR 1067
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 JAN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <29 JAN 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <07 JUL 2004 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NEW DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER(S)?
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, MY, (ABDUL GHAFAR BIN BABA), (MUHAMED GHAZALI BIN SHAFIE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006